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XXVI.—SPENSER'S *MUIOPOTMOS* IN RELATION
TO CHAUCER'S *SIR THOPAS* AND
THE NUN'S PRIEST'S TALE.

Muiopotmos has long been a puzzle to the readers of Spenser. A poem of fantastic beauty built upon a trifle as a subject, a light and fanciful story of over four hundred lines with no apparent lesson or moral, *Muiopotmos* is altogether so unlike "our sage and serious Spenser" that critics have been baffled in their efforts to account for it.

Christopher North is one of the first to attempt an explanation of *Muiopotmos*. He writes as follows: "They who do not know the hidden meaning of *Muiopotmos* must find it out for themselves, but we shall shew them some passages that will set them instantly to the study of Spenser." He then quotes at length and concludes by saying, "Out of the magic circle of the *Faery Queen* there is nothing so beautiful in Spenser as *Muiopotmos*. He is indeed the most poetical of entomologists. That winged impersonation of youth and joy . . . seems a vision sent to reveal to us the secret of happiness lying among flowers spread far and wide over the domains of Innocence. But there is the moral, 'But till Death itself die, no breath is drawn apart from danger. Boy, sea-bold! girl, star bright! Look—look—look there! Death at your arm—into your breast, crawling like a spider!'"¹

Church is in doubt as to the allegorical significance of *Muiopotmos*. His conclusion is that, "Whether it alludes to the death of any promising youth, we know not: but Spenser has told his story in his own way, that is, beautifully."²

¹ *Blackwood's Magazine*, November, 1833 (Vol. 34).

² Church's *Spenser's Faerie Queene*, I, p. xxv.

Lowell writes, "He (Spenser) first shows his mature hand in the *Muiopotmos*, the most airily fanciful of his poems, a marvel for delicate conception and treatment, whose breezy verse seems to float between a blue sky and golden earth in imperishable sunshine. It can hardly be doubted that in Clarion the butterfly he has symbolized himself. 'To reign in the air' was certainly Spenser's function."¹

Craik says of *Muiopotmos*, "The date of 1590, if it be not a typographical error, may possibly have been prefixed to indicate the real events of which there can scarcely, we think, be a doubt that the poem is a veiled representation, although the commentators give us no help towards solving the riddle, nor indeed any hint that there is a riddle to be solved The narrative thus solemnly introduced can hardly be a mere story of a spider and a fly."² Mr. Craik's conclusions to his observations are rather suggestively expressed in his closing words, "and so ends the tale."

Professor Child remarks on the poem, "If *Muiopotmos* be meant for anything more than a simple tale of a spider and a fly, or a fable with the general moral of the insecurity of youth and happiness, the enigma which it contains defies solution."³

Professor Hales quotes Professor Craik, "*Muiopotmos*, as Professor Craik suggests, would seem to be an allegorical narrative of some matter recently transpired."⁴ In another essay Professor Hales, speaking of the *Complaints*, says, "The best poem in the volume, *Muiopotmos*, an allegorical account of a proud butterfly who is swept by a gust of wind into a spider's web, is the most airily fanciful of all Spenser's works."⁵

¹ *North American Review*, April, 1875 (Vol. cxx, p. 365).

² Craik's *Spenser and His Poetry*, III, p. 172.

³ Child's *Spenser*, p. xxxv.

⁴ Morris's *Spenser*, p. xlvi.

⁵ *Dictionary of National Biography* (Vol. 53, Article on Spenser).

Palgrave thinks that in his love for flowers, Clarion "clearly represents the ideal of a gallant youth among the ladies of the court." He also believes that in *Muiopotmos* Spenser would teach the lesson of "mutable Fortune and immutable Fate."¹ He then adds, "It neither is a whole as a story, an allegory, nor a moralization; and one asks in what humour a poet so sage and serious as Spenser, an artist so finished, can have painted this picture?—a question for sufficient answer to which he might have pointed triumphantly to the exquisiteness with which the fairy web is wrought and embroidered; to the poet's right, now and then, to be fancy-free."

It will be seen from the foregoing comments on *Muiopotmos* that there is practical unanimity on two points; first, that it is an allegory, and second, that nobody knows what the allegory is. Three possible allegorical interpretations have been suggested. One is that Clarion, the butterfly, represents Spenser himself. But how does it represent him? What events of his life are masked in the story? To say that Spenser here symbolizes himself as a poet soaring aloft on the wings of his imagination, and that "to reign in the air was certainly Spenser's function," does not carry us far, and reduces the allegory to a vanishing point. "Reigning in the air" is not the central idea of the poem. Whether *Muiopotmos* symbolizes anything or not, it must be admitted that the real point to the story lies not in Clarion's escaping into "delight with liberty," but in the tragic end which overtakes him. The poem opens with this idea. The first line introduces us to a song of "deadly dolorous debate." The fate of the butterfly, therefore, clearly cannot be ignored in any effort at allegorical interpretation. If Spenser has symbolized himself in Clarion, the meaning of the symbol is far from apparent.

¹Grosart's *Spenser*, iv, p. lxx.

Another proposed interpretation is that the poem is a veiled representation of real events, "an allegorical narrative of some matter recently transpired." As to whether this matter is political and a part of the court life, or whether it is more personal and private, those who hold this view offer no opinion. Neither have they any suggestion as to whom the matter concerns. We may therefore dismiss this second interpretation on the ground that it really has no solution to propose. It goes no further than to say that the poem *must* mean something, *must* have some allegorical significance, because it "can hardly be a mere story of a spider and a fly." Just why it cannot be, we are not told, except that it is too "solemnly introduced."

The third interpretation seems at first glance to deserve more serious consideration. To say that Clarion is the winged "Impersonation of Youth and Joy," living a life of careless freedom and innocent pleasure, all unconscious of the ever threatening enemy of Death, sounds neither unattractive nor unreasonable. And yet even here the allegory breaks down before it gets fairly started; for instead of Clarion's representing the free and careless joys of youth, he starts out in conscious anticipation of a possible foe, and deliberately arms himself, cap-a-pie, for an expected combat.

Thus it appears that although scholars generally believe *Muiopotmos* to be an allegory, no one has yet offered an allegorical interpretation which even approximates an adequate explanation. In fact, most of those who have dealt with the poem have assumed that it must be allegorical, and then have sought an interpretation which would justify their assumption. Allegory has been assumed mainly for two reasons.¹ In the first place *Muiopotmos* seems to have

¹Spenser asks Lady Carey in the dedication of *Muiopotmos*, "of all things therein . . . to make a milde construction." This, however, does

no meaning in and of itself. It cannot be understood as a piece of pure narrative, and must, therefore, it is concluded, be allegorical. In the second place, allegory has been assumed because Spenser wrote it. We have acquired the habit of expecting allegory when we come to Spenser. But granting that *Muiopotmos* is an allegory, it must be admitted, as Professor Child says, that "the enigma which it contains defies solution." And herein, as allegory, it is quite unlike Spenser. Whatever else his allegories may be, they are not obscure. Their meaning is written in large letters on the face of every one of them. Why then should Spenser be so unintelligible here? To interpret *Muiopotmos* as though it *must* be allegory is to proceed, I believe, on an entirely gratuitous assumption.

I wish to propose another interpretation of *Muiopotmos*,—an interpretation based on facts which, as far as I am aware, have not been mentioned hitherto in connection with the poem. I shall attempt to show that Spenser wrote *Muiopotmos* as a purely mock-heroic poem, and that he wrote it under the influence of the two mock-heroic poems of Chaucer, *Sir Thopas* and the *Nun's Priest's Tale*. That in the latter part of *Muiopotmos* Spenser had parts of the *Nun's Priest's Tale* definitely in mind, becomes at once evident when passages of the two poems are put side by side. The influence of *Sir Thopas* on *Muiopotmos*, however, is much less tangible, though, I believe, none the less real. *Sir Thopas* is in itself such a composite of conventional phrases and situations, such a medley of burlesque imitations from medieval romances, that it would be extremely difficult to prove anything imitated directly from it, save the title itself, which is presumably quite unique. When we remember,

not imply that the poem has an ulterior meaning. In these words Spenser is simply asking Lady Carey to accept graciously and to judge charitably the verses he is offering.

however, that Spenser was very familiar with Chaucer's poem,¹ and also bear in mind the fact established later in this discussion, that Spenser is here imitating Chaucer's other mock-heroic poem, the *Num's Priest's Tale*, the many points of similarity between *Muiopotmos* and *Sir Thopas* seem to be something more than accidental.

A comparison of Clarion, the hero of Spenser's poem, with Chaucer's Sir Thopas, reveals the following points in common :²

- (1) Each is introduced as a young knight whose father is lord of the realm.
- (2) Each is given the same personal appearance and the same traits of character. Both are "fair and gent," courageous and doughty, and without a peer.
- (3) Each finds favor in the eyes of the conventional maid, "bright in bour."
- (4) Each is especially fond of sporting along the river.
- (5) Each is clad in armor particularly noted for its "substance pure," its rare metal, and its curious engravings.
- (6) Each starts out on a summer's day with no expressed purpose other than "abroad to fare."
- (7) Each develops a purpose *en route*, and is described as restless until he has reached a definite goal.

¹Spenser mentions Sir Thopas by name twice, once in *F. Q.*, 3-7-48, and again in the *Present State of Ireland*, 3056 (Grosart's *Spenser*, Vol. ix). He also uses elsewhere words and phrases which from their context give almost conclusive evidence of being imitated from *Sir Thopas*.

As to the general popularity of *Sir Thopas* in Spenser's time, Warton states (*Observations on F. Q.*, I, p. 73) that the poem was sung to the harp in the age of Queen Elizabeth.

²Points, most of which, it must be admitted, might also be had in common by many other heroes of romance. This fact, however, in no way invalidates the resemblances here.

Clarion seeks the "gay gardins" as his destination; Thopas "priketh" toward the "contree of Fairye."

- (8) Each is noted for his speed, and special mention is made of it.
- (9) Each is given a similar conventional environment. Thopas has the list of herbs and birds, Clarion the list of herbs and flowers.

In addition to these several points of resemblance there is especially to be noted that which moves through them all, binds them all together, and gives them a significance which otherwise they would not have,—the mock-heroic spirit in which every description, circumstance, and incident of both poems is written. I quote the following not as parallel passages to prove imitations in phraseology, but merely as corresponding passages to show the general likeness between the two poems, and further to illustrate the particular resemblances enumerated above.

Muipotmos.

Was none more *favourable*, nor more
faire,

 Of all alive did seeme the *fairest*
 wight, (20 ff.)
 .
 The fresh yong flie, in whom the
 kindly fire
 Of lustfull yongth began to kindle
 fast,
 Did much disdaine to subject his
 desire
 To loathsome sloth, or houres in
 ease to wast,

Sir Thopas.

Al of a knyght was *fair* and
gent (4)
 Whyt was his face as payndemayn,
 His lippes rede as rose;
 His rode is lyk scarlet in grayn,
 (14 ff.)
 (Compare the spirit of Sir Thopas
 who was a great hunter, hawker,
 archer, and wrestler.)

But joy'd to range abroad in *fresh*
attire.¹ (33 ff.)

. . . . he along would *flie*
Upon the streaming rivers, sport to
finde; (47)

Full of brave courage and bold
hardyhed,

Above th' ensample of his equall
peares, (27-8)

As should be worthie of his father's
throne. (22)

Of the wide rule of his renowned
sire. (40)

And *ryde an hauking for riveer*,
With grey goshaue on honde :
(26-7)

Sir Thopas wex a doghty swayn,
(13)

Of wrastling was ther noon his *peer*,
(29)

His fader was a man ful free,
And lord he was of that countree,
(10-11)

Clarion and Thopas affect the ladies in much the same way, and there will be observed here also a similarity in phrasing.²

Muiopotmos.

Full manie a ladie, faire in court,
full oft
Beholding them (wings) him
secretly envide, (105-6)

Sir Thopas.

Ful many a mayde, bright in bour,
They moorne for him, paramour,
(31-2)

After describing Clarion as above, Spenser sends him forth much as Chaucer sends out Sir Thopas. Immediately following the descriptions of the two lusty knights occur the following lines, with the same order of sequence in both poems :

¹ Cf. Thopas' attire :

His shoon of Cordewane,
Of Brugges were his hosen broun,
His robe was of ciclatoun,
That coste many a jane. (21 ff.)

² Of course such stock romance phrases could of themselves argue little as to source. These passages have significance only as a part of other evidence.

Muiopotmos.

So on a summers day,
.
 Yong Clarion, with vauntfull
 lustiehead,
 After his guize did cast abroad to
fare, (48 ff.)

Sir Thopas.

And so bifel up-on a day,
For sothe, as I yow telle may,
Sir Thopas wolde out ryde : (38 ff.)

Spenser arms Clarion at once. Chaucer arms Sir Thopas later, after he has met the giant Olifaunt. But there is an interesting resemblance between the armors of the two knights, as well as in the mock-heroic spirit in which the arming proceeds. The following lines show that Spenser had in mind either Chaucer's description or else a similar description which Chaucer himself was parodying.

Muiopotmos.

His breastplate first, that was of
substance pure,
 Before his *noble heart* he firmly
 bound,
 That mought his life from *yron*
death assure,
 And ward his *gentle corpes* from
 cruell wound : (57 ff.)
 Upon his head, his glistening
 burganet,
 The which was *wrought by wonderous*
device,
 And *curiously engraven*, he did set :
 (73 ff.)

Sir Thopas.

And over that an habergeoun
 For *percinge of his herte ; (150-1)*

 (He dide next his *whyte lere*) (146)

 Upon his crest he bar a tour, (195)
 (And over that a fyn hauberk,
Was al y-wrought of Jewes werk,)
 (152-3)
 And ther-in was a *bores heed,*
 A *charboele bisyde ; (160 ff.)*

Chaucer, it will be remembered, emphasizes the costliness of Thopas' attire by bringing his articles of dress from foreign lands. Spenser adopts the same method of emphasis with reference to Clarion's armor, except that he states it negatively. Compare the following :

Muiopotmos.

Not Bilbo steele, nor brasse from
 Corinth fet,
 Nor *costly* oricalche from strange
Phoenix ; (77-8)
 The *mettall* was of rare and *passing*
price ; (76)

Sir Thopas.

His shoon of *Cordewane*,
 Of *Brugges* were his hosen broun,
 His robe was of ciclatoun,
 That *coste many a jane*. (21 ff.)
 His sheeld was al of gold so reed,
 (158)

When Clarion starts upon his flight his conduct is not unlike that of Sir Thopas.

Muiopotmos.

And with good speed began to take
 his flight ;
 Over the fields, in his franke lusti-
 nesse,

 The woods, the rivers, and the
 meadowes greene,
 With his aire-cutting wings he
 measured wide,

 But none of these, how ever sweete
 they beene,
 Mote please his fancie, nor him
 cause t' abide :

 To the gay *gardins* his unstaide-
 sire,
 Him wholly caried, to refresh his
 sprights. (147 ff.)

Sir Thopas.

He priketh thurgh a fair forest,
 (43)

 And priked as he were wood ; (63)

Neither can Sir Thopas be satisfied with "the woods, the rivers, the meadowes green." As Clarion seeks the "gay gardins," so Thopas will on to the "*contree of Fairye*."

Into his sadel he clamb anoon,
 And priketh over style and stoon. (85-6)

After Clarion reaches the "gay gardins," Spenser introduces the conventional list of herbs and flowers. It does not prove that he got the suggestion from Chaucer, but it is interesting to observe that Chaucer had also introduced the

list of herbs in *Sir Thopas*.¹ The significant fact is that the two poets are rather consistently doing the same thing.²

There are no further points of resemblance between these two poems. In fact this is as far as the Thopas story goes. Chaucer gets him armed and into the "contree of Fairye," but there leaves him drinking

"water of the wel,
As did the knight sir Percivel."

But Spenser cannot so drop Clarion. He has started out to "sing of deadly dolorous debate"; he must carry his hero through to his final destiny. He must also keep the tone mock-heroic. And interestingly enough, having exhausted *Sir Thopas*, Spenser now turns to Chaucer's other mock-heroic poem, and takes from it suggestions for the latter part of his narrative. He is here to introduce a new character, Aragnoll, the spider. This character he models after Russel the fox, while Clarion himself, seemingly to preserve the analogy of situation, moves out of *Sir Thopas* into Chaunticleer.³ The "gay gardin" marks the scene of transition.⁴ Here occur two stanzas in which Spenser discusses the mutability of earthly fortune and the problem of free-will and necessity, both of which seem to be suggested directly by Chaucer's discussion of the same questions in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*.⁵ The two passages should be compared in

¹ It is commonly assumed that Chaucer here makes use of the conventional list as a burlesque on *The Squire of Low Degree*.

² Lowell says of this passage (*North American Review*, April, 1875, p. 367, note), "It is a pretty reminiscence of his master Chaucer, but is also very characteristic of Spenser himself."

³ And, indeed, this change of character is not such a transformation, after all. Chaunticleer and Thopas have many traits in common. Naturally both are surrounded by the mock-heroic atmosphere.

⁴ It is not necessary to outline the points of similarity between *Muiopotmos* and the *Nun's Priest's Tale*. The imitation is unmistakable.

⁵ This discussion occurs, it should be noted, in exactly that part of the *Nun's Priest's Tale* from which Spenser obviously draws his other material, and relates itself to the situation parallel to the one in *Muiopotmos*.

their entirety, but the subjoined lines will make clear the identity of the central ideas of the two poets.

*Muiopotmos.**Nun's Priest's Tale.*

But what on earth can long abide in state,	God woot that worldly joye is sone ago ; (386)
Or who can him assure of happie day ;	
Sith morning faire may bring fowle evening late, (217 ff.)	For ever the latter ende of joye is wo. (385)
And whatso heavens in their secret doome	[O destinee, that mayst nat been eschewed ! (518)]
Ordained have, how can fraile freshly wight	
Forecast, but it <i>must needs</i> to issue come ? (225 ff.)	But what that god forwoot <i>not</i> <i>needes be</i> , (413)
. . . unhappie happie flie, Whose cruel fate is woven even now (234-5)	
Nought may thee save from heavens avengement. ¹ (240)	

Continuing the narrative Spenser presents a situation very close to that found in Chaucer's story.

*Muiopotmos.**Nun's Priest's Tale.*

It fortun'd (as heavens had be- hight)	
That in this gardin, where yong Clarion	Into the yerd, ther Chaunticleer the faire
Was wont to solace him, a wicked wight,	Was wont, and eek his wyves, to repaire ; (399 ff.)
Had lately built his hatefull man- sion, (241 ff.)	A col-fox, ful of sly iniquitee, That in the grove hadde woned yeres three, (395-6)

¹ The following lines may also have been suggested by Chaucer :

For thousand perills *lie in close awaite*
About us daylie, to worke our decay ; (221-2)

Compare the *Nun's Priest's Tale*,

As gladly doon thise homicydes alle,
That in *awayt ligen* to mordre men. (404-5)

(And his false hart, *fraught* with all
treasons store,) (395)

(Like as a *wily foxe*¹) (401)

And, *lurking* closely, in *awayte* now
lay,

How he might anie in his trap be-
tray. (247-8)

(About the *cave* in which he *lurking*
dwelt,) (358)

(Lay *lurking covertly* him to sur-
prise,) (386)

(Lyes in ambushment of his hoped
pray,) (404)

(Himselfe he *close upgathered* more
and more

Into his den, etc.) (397)

And in a bed of wortes stille he *lay*,

Wayting his tyme on Chauntecleer
to falle, (401 ff.)

O false morderer, *lurking in thy den!*
(406)

The lordly air of freedom and security exhibited by Clarion just before "his fatall future woe," reminds the reader at once of the fearless and royal Chauntecleer.

Muiopotmos.

. . . the careless Clarion,
That rang'd each where without
suspition.

Suspition of friend, nor feare of foe,
That hazarded his health, had he at
all,

But walks at will, and *wandered too*
and fro.

In the pride of his *freedome prin-*
cipall;²

Little wist he his fatall future woe,
But *was secure*; (375 ff.)

. . . without foresight,

As he that did all *daunger quite*
despise, (390)

Nun's Priest's Tale.

. . . and Chauntecleer *so free*
Song merier than the mermayde in
the see; (449)

And on his toos he *rometh up and*
down,

Him *deynde not to sette his foot to*
grounde. (360-1)

Thus royal, *as a prince is in his*
halle, (364)

Royal he was, he was *namore aferd*;
(356)

¹ This is *prima facie* evidence that Spenser had a fox in mind in this description of Aragnoll.

² Principall = princely.

At this point in the narrative, before Clarion has been seized by Aragnoll, Spenser introduces what in Chaucer occurs after Chauntecleer has been carried off by the fox. But the ideas of the two passages are so nearly identical it is hard not to believe that Spenser had Chaucer's lines in mind.

*Muiopotmos.**Nun's Priest's Tale.*

Who now shall give unto my heave
eyes

A well of tears,¹ that all may over-
flow?

Or where shall I find *lamentable*
cryes,

And mournfull tunes enough *my*
griefe to show?

Helpe, O thou Tragick Muse, me to
devise

Notes sad enough, t' expresse this
bitter throw; (409 ff.)

O Gaufred, dere mayster soverayn,
Why ne hadde I now thy sentence
and thy lore, (527 ff.)

(Certes, swich cry ne lamentacioun)
(535)

Than wolde I shewe yow how that I
coude pleyne

For Chauntecleres drede, and for
his peyne. (533 ff.)

Chaucer illustrates the great sorrow over the fate of Chauntecleer by comparing it with the classic examples of grief associated with the fall of Troy and the burning of Carthage and of Rome. Spenser simply calls on the "Tragick Muse" to help him express "this bitter throw."

In addition to the foregoing passages the following lines may be considered as conclusive evidence of Spenser's indebtedness to the *Nun's Priest's Tale*.

*Muiopotmos.**Nun's Priest's Tale.*

He likest is to fall into *mischaunce*,
*That is regardles of his governaunce.*²

(384-5)

'Nay,' quod the fox, 'but god yeve
him *meschaunce*,

That is so undiscreet of governaunce
(613-4)

Like a grimme lyon (434)

. . . . *as it were a grim leoun:*

(359).

¹ Cf. Jeremiah 9-1.

² The imitation here is unmistakable. Aside from the practical identity between the second lines of the couplets, the rhyming words ending in *-aunce* will be noted.

But there is more evidence still. Where did Spenser get the name *Clarion*? In the light of the foregoing collateral testimony I think we may safely say that *Clarion* is *Chaunticleer's* name-sake.¹ The obvious etymological kinship of the two names supports this supposition. This raises the question as to whether Spenser had *Chaunticleer* in mind in the first part of the poem, as the name of *Clarion*, it will be remembered, is given to the butterfly at the very outset. *Clarion*, however, shows little of the real character of *Chaunticleer* until near the end of the narrative (ll. 376 ff.) But this fact is not inconsistent with his having derived his name from *Chaunticleer*. Indeed Spenser may have adopted the name *Clarion* for his butterfly after he had finished the poem.

It may be stated then with certainty that in the latter part of *Muiopotmos* Spenser has imitated the *Nun's Priest's Tale*. That in the first part of *Muiopotmos* he has likewise imitated *Sir Thopas*, is not capable, perhaps, of such absolute proof. One thing, however, is true; Spenser was here either imitating Chaucer, or else he was imitating what Chaucer imitated, or else he was writing an independent mock-heroic poem—and in a vein quite unlike himself—in which his hero resembles to a remarkable degree the hero of Chaucer's poem; a poem too with which we know Spenser was already very familiar. It has been seen that in *Muiopotmos* Spenser imitates Chaucer's only other mock-heroic poem. Is it likely that he would remember *Chauntecleer* and forget *Sir Thopas*? Forget *Sir Thopas* whom on at least two other occasions he remembered well enough to mention by name—an honor bestowed on no other character of his

¹ Cf. *Daphnaida*, where Spenser gets the name *Alcyon* from *Aleyone*, mentioned in the *Book of the Duchess* which Spenser is there imitating. See my discussion of this point in *Pub. Mod. Lang. Assn.*, December, 1903, pp. 658-9.

old master's tales! It is a reasonable assumption, without any evidence, that Spenser would have Sir Thopas in mind when writing a mock-heroic poem. But sufficient evidence has been adduced, I believe, to turn this assumption into a certainty. Clarion is a happy composite, made up of about equal parts of Sir Thopas and Chauntecleer, with the honor of "name-saint" going to Chauntecleer.

What, then, in conclusion, is the bearing of the foregoing facts on the interpretation of *Muiopotmos*? In the first place it must be conceded that the mere presence of Chaucerian influence is not of itself inconsistent with an allegorical interpretation. If the poem is an allegory, it is no less so because it imitates Chaucer. But if it is not an allegory, this imitation of Chaucer suggests another explanation. In the absence of even a plausible theory of allegorical interpretation, the most reasonable explanation seems to be that Spenser is here simply trying his hand at mock-heroic. We need assign him no motive. We need look for no moral. The doing of it is its own justification. And the results are exactly what might be expected from Spenser in an attempt at mock-heroic—good poetry, but little humor. Indeed, I believe it is in large measure due to this absence of humor in the poem that most of those who have written about it have missed the mock-heroic element. Perhaps they have missed it, also, because the mock-heroic was not expected from the serious Spenser. They have approached *Muiopotmos* with the question of its being allegory already decided. In a poem of such a character, one must of course always admit the possibility of allegory, but the whole spirit of *Muiopotmos* is foreign to that of Spenser's other allegorical poems. The spirit of *Muiopotmos* is mock-heroic from beginning to end.

As to Spenser's choice of a subject for this poem, the idea of using the butterfly may have come from Virgil's *Gnat*,

which Spenser had already translated.¹ The mock-heroic treatment also may have been suggested by the same poem, in which there is a pretty large mock-heroic element. This question, however, does not affect the main points of my thesis, that *Muiopotmos* is a mock-heroic poem, and that it was written under the influence of Chaucer's two mock-heroic poems, *Sir Thopas* and the *Nun's Priest's Tale*.

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¹ Mr. Reed Smith has proposed the theory that Spenser got the butterfly from Ovid's story of Arachne, which story is told in *Muiopotmos* to explain the enmity between Clarion and Aragnoll.